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BRIDGEWATER'S INSTITUTE FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

by Barbara Apstein

All seven phones in the Political Science Department's new Telephone Research Center were in continual use during the evenings of October 12, 13, 14 and 15, 1998, as students from Professor Michael Ault's "Political Science Research Methods" class asked selected voters to share their thoughts about the approaching election. Using a random sample of households in 42 southeastern Massachusetts cities and towns designed by Political Science Professor Victor DeSantis, the students conducted a total of 370 interviews with registered voters. They gathered responses to such questions as the following:

What issues are important to you in this year's election?

Whom are you going to vote for?

Have President Clinton's problems had any impact on your voting plans?

What do you see as the positive and negative qualities of gubernatorial candidates Cellucci and Harshbarger?

This pre-election poll served both as a class project and as the fulfillment of a contract between the College's Institute for Regional Development and two area newspapers, the *Brockton Enterprise* and the *Quincy Patriot Ledger*. About 830,000 people, 14% of the Massachusetts population, live in Plymouth, Norfolk and Bristol counties, the area covered by the poll. Both newspapers published the results of the poll on October 23.

Area voters' preferences turned out to be fairly close to those of the majority of voters in the state as a whole. The poll showed Paul Cellucci's lead over Scott Harshbarger to be stronger locally than it proved to be in the rest of the Commonwealth. In the poll, Cellucci led by a margin of 46.2% to 34% (with 17.5% undecided), whereas the election result was much closer, Cellucci squeaking by with 51% of the vote while Harshbarger received 47%. The poll also

revealed that Cellucci attracted more support than his rival from unenrolled voters, who make up half the electorate state-wide. Cellucci appealed to many registered Democrats; 28% of the Democrats polled expressed a preference for him, but only 2% of registered Republicans said they planned to vote for Harshbarger. While Cellucci won high approval for the state's strong economy, one-third of those polled said they were troubled by his personal debt.

In other campaigns, too, area voters supported the candidates who ultimately won the election: for Treasurer, they favored Whitman resident Shannon O'Brien and for Attorney General, Thomas Reilly.

When asked about issues, the respondents identified education as the top concern, with 87% listing it as "a very important" matter for the governor to deal with and another 11.2% considering it "somewhat important." When asked what they considered the single most important issue for the next governor and legislature to tackle, 51.8% said education. Health care and the economy were the two other issues which proved to be most important to local voters.

The poll also addressed national issues. Close to 80% of respondents decisively rejected the idea of impeaching President Clinton, a significantly wider margin than in the nation as a whole. Almost as many local voters (77%) favored ending congressional hearings on the impeachment report of independent counsel Kenneth Starr. Of those voters, 33% wanted the matter dropped completely and 44% wanted the hearings to end but the president to be censured.

The poll also revealed that 53% of area voters feel that the public has the right to know at least "a little" about a candidate's private life. More than 15% of the respondents said the public should know "a lot," while 31% said the public should know nothing about the private lives of the candidates.



Cellucci strong on S. Shore

LEDGER POLL RESULTS

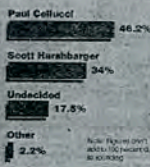
The candidates, the issues

Results of survey of 370 registered voters in 42 communities south of Boston.



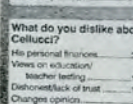
Paul Cellucci

If the election was held today, for whom would you most likely vote?

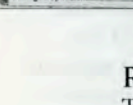


Scott Harshbarger

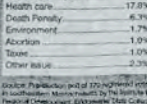
What do you like about Cellucci?



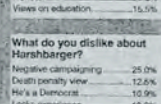
What do you dislike about Cellucci?



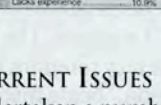
What issue is most important for the next governor and Legislature to deal with?



What do you like about Harshbarger?



What do you dislike about Harshbarger?



Education is top local issue

By Lauren Markoe
Patriot Ledger State House Bureau

By a larger margin than elsewhere in the state, voters in southeastern Massachusetts support Paul Cellucci over Scott Harshbarger in the race for governor, a poll conducted for The Patriot Ledger and The Enterprise of Brockton shows.

Quality of education is the top issue for voters, according to the poll, followed by health care, the economy and jobs.

The death penalty was rated very important by fewer than half those polled, while the environment and abortion barely registered as issues important for the next governor to deal with.

Acting Gov. Cellucci, a Republican, leads Attorney General Harshbarger, a Democrat, 46 percent to 34 percent, according to the poll of registered voters in 42 cities and towns south of Boston.

About 17.5 percent of those contacted in the telephone survey said they hadn't decided. The poll results were made public today.

An overwhelming majority of those polled, 97 percent, said education was a "very important" factor in deciding who would get their vote for governor Nov. 3, and 51 percent said improving schools should be the top priority for the next governor and Legislature.

"It seems to be the key issue in this election," said pollster Victor DeSantis, a political science professor at Bridgewater State College.

The poll was conducted for the newspaper by DeSantis and Michael Auli, both of the Institute for Regional Development at Bridgewater State. Telephone interviews were conducted with 370 voters, and the poll had a 4 percent margin of error. The Ledger and the Enterprise are properties of Newspaper Media LLC.

The key result — Cellucci's 15-point lead over Harshbarger — demonstrated Cellucci's strength in the region. A poll of voters statewide was released earlier this week and showed a 5-point spread between Harshbarger and Cellucci.

But the race here is still tight, DeSantis said.

for the Homeless and Helpline, as well as representatives from Bridgewater's Social Work and Political Science faculties and graduate students in Social Work. Professor of Social Work Cindy King-Frode serves as facilitator.

The meetings provide State Commissioner of Transitional Assistance Claire McIntire, who is also a member of the Task Force, with an opportunity to talk informally with grassroots bureaucrats who work with welfare clients on a day-to-day basis. With the two-year benefit limit running out for approximately 12,000 Massachusetts welfare families, recent meetings have focussed on the barriers to gaining employment which this group faces. These barriers include lack of fluency in English for recent Vietnamese and Cambodian immigrants, the difficulty of finding child care and lack of transportation. Task Force members discuss, often heatedly, ways of addressing these problems.

In addition, the Institute has sponsored training events, including workshops in computer applications for economic developers and the Massachusetts Municipal Management fall conference.

Bridgewater's Institute for Regional Development is continuing to develop creative projects which contribute to the intellectual life of southeastern Massachusetts.

Governor's Race and Candidate Ratings

Figure 11

Respondent's Current Vote For Governor (Without Leaners)

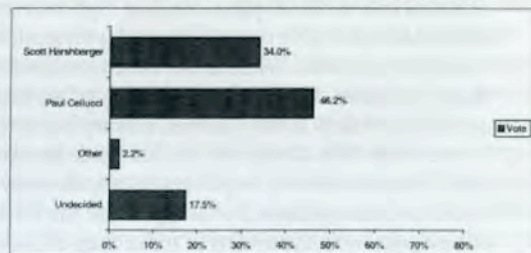
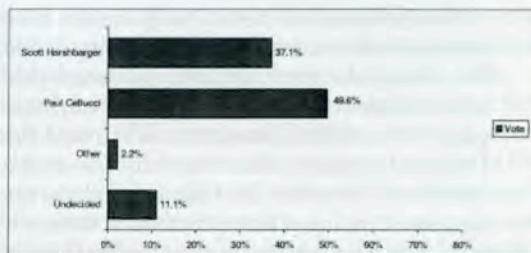


Figure 12

Respondent's Current Vote For Governor (With Leaners)



2008 Pre-Election Poll for Southeastern Massachusetts
Confidential

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RESEARCH ON CURRENT ISSUES

The Institute has undertaken a number of other projects since it was established in 1996. As Professor DeSantis, who is Coordinator of the Institute, explains, service to our region is an important part of the College's mission. His goal is to discover creative ways to utilize the resources of the College and the talents of the Bridgewater faculty to improve the quality of life in southeastern Massachusetts.

Undertaking research on current problems and issues is one way in which the Institute hopes to serve our region. In 1996, the Institute undertook a study of quality of life in southeastern Massachusetts, exploring the public's perception of such issues as health care, public schools and the environment. A Town Meeting Study conducted by Professor DeSantis in 1997 collected data from town clerks to answer questions about how their town meetings operate, the number of people who attend, and whether or not the meetings are televised. Students enrolled in the College's Masters of Public Administration program were involved in another study, sponsored by the town of Milford, focusing on the programs and policies used by the town to stimulate industrial development.

MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES

Making College facilities available for meetings and conferences is another aspect of the Institute's work. The Southeastern Massachusetts Welfare Reform Task Force, which meets three to four times a year, is one of several groups hosted by the College. This Task Force includes welfare professionals from Departments of Transitional Assistance in Brockton and Taunton, the Brockton Coalition

Barbara Apstein is Associate Editor of the Bridgewater Review.